

## **FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** June 14, 2018

**Agenda Item:** Fish Creek WMA Addition–Koch Inholdings (R2)

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 minutes

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### **Background:**

FWP proposes to purchase two private inholdings totaling approximately 276 acres of vital wildlife and fish habitat in Fish Creek and to block up FWP ownership and management of the Fish Creek WMA. The appraised value and purchase price of these parcels is \$900,000, which would be paid for with Habitat Montana funds.

Acquiring these inholdings would eliminate the threat of development that would compromise the ecological integrity of the Fish Creek watershed and be a source of management conflicts while providing additional opportunity for public hunting and other recreation. The parcels fill a crucial gap in public ownership that connects wildlife movement across a broader landscape and protects key habitat for bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. The Fish Creek drainage is a Tier 1 Terrestrial Focal Area for wildlife connectivity and a high priority linkage zone for carnivores (grizzly bear, lynx, wolverine, etc.) between the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem, Ninemile Divide and the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness. The subject parcels provide an important migratory corridor for elk and mule deer from the WMA to the higher elevation summer range in the Great Burn Proposed Wilderness, as well as 1.2 miles of Fish Creek, 120 acres of which is identified as a bull trout critical habitat priority area providing a key migratory corridor and rearing area.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results:**

FWP released a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for public review on March 14, 2018, and accepted public comment through April 13, 2018 (30 days). A public hearing was held in Alberton (Mineral County) on March 22. FWP received a total of 82 public comments, with 73 supporting and 3 opposing the proposal, and 6 not (clearly) stating support or opposition. Support included many individuals, in addition to 1 timber company and 11 organizations; opposition was from 3 individuals (1 anonymous).

### **Alternatives and Analysis:**

The only viable alternative to this proposal would be to forego this acquisition project. The parcel is developable and a nearby parcel was sold recently, has buildings on it, and is posted against public access.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale:**

FWP recommends that the commission approve the purchase of this addition to the Fish Creek WMA. The property has high fish/wildlife habitat and recreation values and is strategic to other lands where FWP retains interest.

### **Proposed Motion:**

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the purchase of the Koch Addition to the Fish Creek Wildlife Management Area.